

## The Impact of Postsocialist Institutional Change on Life Chances and Values of Different Social Groups (Editorial)

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**Editorial:**

## **The Impact of Postsocialist Institutional Change on Life Chances and Values of Different Social Groups**

This issue of STSS is more sociologically oriented. The leading theme is the impact on life trajectories and values of the metamorphosis of institutions and the changing patterns of social inequality in different Central and Eastern European countries. The speed and depth of changes in postsocialist countries has posed a challenge to social scientists and provoked much research (see for example Nee, 1989; Stark & Bruszt, 1998; Burawoy & Verdery, 1999; Domanski, 2000; Eyal, Szelenyi & Townley, 2000; Kennedy, 2002; Diewald, Goedicke & Mayer, 2006; Saar, 2011 etc.). Studying market societies in the process of development presents a rare opportunity to obtain fundamental insight into how institutions and markets interact to shape individuals' life courses and to determine overall patterns of social inequality. Postsocialist societies can also be seen as an extraordinary laboratory for testing both existing theories and elaborating new ones. Concurrently with the transformation of societies, the multidisciplinary international research community addressed and developed distinct theories and approaches concerning the process and effects of the change.

The review article (Kollmorgen, 2013) sheds light on these approaches in the social science debate on postcommunism, and three novel approaches are critically discussed: the postcommunism approach, the governance approach, and the Europeanisation approach. The author concludes that a new second generation of transformation theories has been emerging since the late 1990s. He summarises the following characteristics of this second generation: the state socialist legacies are not perceived only in terms of obstacles making, therefore, the final step beyond the 'negative sociology' of postcommunist transformation; contextualisation of the complexity of different paths of transformation and variants of postcommunism and advancement transformation theory based on historical and comparative perspective; combining different approaches and theories. According to the author, the most important challenge facing a possible third generation is constructing interdisciplinary social science theories of societal transformation.

Articles in this issue observe different postsocialist countries (Russia, Ukraine, Moldova, East Germany, Estonia), indicating also the emergence of heterogeneity among postsocialist societies.

The first article (Morrison, Sacchetti & Cretu, 2013) focuses on migrant workers' agency through exploring the relationship between working and employment conditions, on one side, and labour mobility, on the other. The study investigates migrant labour from Ukraine and Moldova working in the construction sector in Italy and in the Russian Federation, respectively. The research aims include the identification of the migrants' aspirations and expectations, their forms of resistance, and their effects on migration patterns. Findings suggest that high levels of labour turnover exist at the crossroad between the workers' exit and exhaustion in an industry where variable forms of coercion and harsh working conditions consume a constantly expanding army of migrant labour. However, labour turnover in the Russian and EU construction industry is structurally different.

The second article (Jansen, Dessens & Verhoeven, 2013) has two different aims: to elaborate a new decomposition method for the analysis of income inequality, and to apply this method to survey data from Russia spanning the first decade of market transition (1992-2002). The authors address an important issue in stratification research; more specifically, the extent to which mechanisms at the level of individual income attainment contribute to income inequality at the macro level. The article displays evidence that there is a low level of explained income inequality in Russia during the first

years of the transition due to uncertainty. Between 1996 and 1999 a larger part of the income inequality could be explained, and 'winner' and 'loser' categories of the transition could be distinguished. To a large extent, changes in income distribution after the first years of transition can be attributed to two groups that were virtually nonexistent during communism – the self-employed and the unemployed.

The following article (Raudsepp, Tart & Heinla, 2013) maps the dynamics of value patterns in Estonia between 1985 and 2008. The analysis shows a relative stability of the value structure and a change in the meaning of some life values (professional work, close friends). There is less change when comparing 1985 and 2008 than between the 90's and 00's. The authors conclude that the 90s and 00s are qualitatively distinct periods in terms of value consciousness, and the societal re-stabilisation in 2008 has revived the pattern of life values that was observed before the beginning of societal turmoil in 1985. Findings also reveal a clear tendency of structural change: a dichotomy of value profiles on the ethno-linguistic basis in 1985 and 1993 was replaced by a dichotomy of value profiles on the basis of age in 2003 and 2008. They describe postsocialist value differentiation as a process in which former pseudo-materialist values have become genuine post-materialist ones for the winners of postsocialist change and have transformed into survival values for the losers.

The fourth article (Täht & Paškov, 2013) concentrates on attitudes towards education and educational inequality in Estonia. Another aim of the study is to see the extent to which these attitudes and perceptions relate to social status. Findings show that education is considered to be very important in Estonia. However, the perceived value of education differs between various social groups: it is considered somewhat less 'valuable' among lower social status groups. The article displays evidence that generally people in Estonia tend to believe that the opportunities to access higher education are unequal. People feel that access to university depends on the wealth of the family, while disadvantages stem from the socio-demographic groups. Non-Estonians as the minority group in Estonia are more likely to perceive restrictions in the chance to access higher education than Estonians, but no ethnic group differences could be observed in the value of education. The negative attitudes of non-Estonians could also be seen as strong criticism towards the existing educational opportunities in Estonia. The findings indicated that although education is generally valued highly, the way it is associated with perceived access chances is not always universal.

The fifth article (Blossfeld, 2013) compares the entry into motherhood of women in full-time education in East and West Germany before and after German unification. The author concludes that the decision of becoming a mother in full-time education is strongly influenced by two competing societal norms: first, a normative sequencing norm that women should first finish education before they have their first child; second, an age norm that represents societal expectations towards the appropriate age to start having children. In East Germany, the state provided economic security through guaranteed employment, subsidised marriage and births. Comprehensive pro-natalist family and housing policies were introduced to support especially women in full-time education through favoured housing access, free childcare, as well as financial benefits. The sudden end of these policies after unification has led to a massive increase in the conflict between educational participation and motherhood in the Eastern part of Germany. It resulted in a declining fertility of women in education after unification.

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